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AUTHOR Gifford, Carol J.
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ABSTRACT

"Across Ages: Entering the 80's--the Quality of Life," was the theme of a week-long multidisciplinary, intergenerational (ages 14 to 92) model program sponsored by Temple University's Institute on Aging, and held on its suburban Ambler (Pennsylvania) campus in the summer of 1980. Aimed at devising methods of stimulating dialogue and confronting age-related negative myths and stereotypes, and the retreat featured academic, core-group, and recreational/cultural components for its 50 participants, who represented a heterogeneous group in terms of age, race, sex, and socioeconomic and educational background. (Appended materials include a schedule of the retreat's activities, a description of a videocassette recording about the retreat, and a list of papers and references about intergenerational communication.) (RL)

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ACROSS AGES: GENERATIONS COMMUNICATE IN UNIQUE MULTIDISCIPLINARY LEARNING RETREAT AT TEMPLE UNIVERSITY

A

VIDEOTAPE/PAPER PRESENTATION

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Presented at the 1981 SCA Summer Conference on Communication and Gerontology, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, July 22-24 by Carol J. Gifford, Graduate Assistant, The Temple University Institute on Aging and Long Term Care Gerontology Center and Doctoral Candidate, Department of Speech.

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DISCUSSION OF "ACROSS AGES" RETREAT

I. Rationale 1

II. Description 4

III. Evaluation 6

IV. Follow-Up 9

V. Implications 10

Endnotes

Appendix I - Retreat Schedule

Appendix II - Videotape Description

Intergenerational References

I. RATIONALE

People at every age need to communicate with one another in order to experience the fullness of life. We are communicative beings. Our view of the world and of ourselves is shaped by our interactions with others. We need to acknowledge and to be acknowledged at every age and stage across the life span. While each age has its special needs and concerns, all ages share certain needs and concerns. Each generation possesses resources which can potentially benefit other generations --if together they explore those resources. But how often, in our society, are we afforded that opportunity? How often do we have a chance to reach out to a non-family member who is 30 or 40 years older or younger than we are?

We live in a society which is largely age-segregated. One need only look at our social institutions to see the prevalence of age segregation. Our educational system is almost totally geared to meeting the learning needs of children and young adults. Community centers, religious organizations, and public funding agencies typically develop and support separate programs for the young and the old. Retirement communities, often located in geographically remote areas, tend to further isolate the elderly from the mainstream of society. Historically, families provided people of all ages with informal learning opportunities. Children had a chance to interact often with grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other older relatives. Recent changes in familial and social patterns have drastically altered that format. Many young people are now marrying and having children at a later age. Thus some children never get the opportunity to meet or spend many years with their grandparents. More and more young adults move away from home, to other communities, and sometimes disengage themselves from active

involvement in the lives of their parents and grandparents. While it seems clear that family contact between generations persists and that family members do try to meet each others' needs, (Treas, 1977) contact is often difficult due to distance and thus consistent and productive communication between young and old is severely limited. Indeed, Bronfenbrenner says that the phenomenon of segregation by age and its consequences for human behavior and development pose problems of the greatest magnitude for the Western world in general and for American society in particular.

A major consequence of this age segregation is the belief in age-related myths and stereotypes. When people do not get to know each other directly, they form images which are secondhand --often media created (Davis, 1975; Kubey, 1980). These magazine, TV and movie images are often either negative, i.e., the old are pain-ridden, constipated and at least slightly senile; while the young are pot-smoking, self-centered and sexually promiscuous, or they are idealized a la the "Waltons" or the "Brady Bunch." Images of the typical young, old, or middle-aged person we might actually come in contact with are usually not projected.

As a result of the lack of meaningful contact among persons of different generations, children grow up with limited exposure to older people. They not only develop unhealthy myths and fears, but also find themselves unprepared for the changes and adjustments they will have to make over a lifetime. Middle-aged persons lack models to emulate for successful aging and thus often face the post-retirement years with trepidation. They may, therefore, not be equipped to adequately deal with their parent's aging either. With negative images of aging, not only do we avoid older people, we ignore the "elder within us." Just as we have a "child within us", formed by the experiences of our youth, so too do we have an "elder" within, constructed from the beliefs we have

about growing older (Dychtwald). Many people never acknowledge this part of themselves and so wind up feeling angry or depressed when they realize that they too are aging. The elderly, when segregated from the mainstream of society, lose both meaning of their past experiences and a stake in the future. Isolation of one age group from another deprives all people of perspective on their own lives and from the resources, skills, and experiences of people of other stages in the life cycle. This "exclusionary trend...deprives society of one of its greatest resources (Oyer and Oyer, p. 291).

Another consequence of age-segregation is the growing tension between youth and elders. These two groups are in direct competition for scarce resources, power, and prestige. As the young enter the job market seeking financial security and upward mobility, older workers resist being pushed aside solely because of their age. Jealousy and resentment will continue unless our employment situation is changed so that there is room for persons of all ages who want to be part of the work force.

The lack of communication and understanding between these two age groups has also contributed to the increased victimization of the elderly by the young. Crimes against older people have dramatically increased in the last few years. Unless both groups begin to feel less powerless, alienated, and dependent, we could be on the brink of an "intergenerational cold war."

The mandate to help generations draw together to share the resources that each can offer to the other is clear. Examples of innovative intergenerational programs responding to this mandate are increasing. A major thrust of the Philadelphia-based Gray Panthers is intergenerational activity. That is one reason why its founder, Maggie Kuhn, happily agreed to keynote the

example which this paper describes.

II. DESCRIPTION

In an attempt to reconnect the generations, the Temple University Institute on Aging sponsored a unique week-long residential intergenerational learning retreat in the summer of 1980. For eight days, fifty people, ranging in age from 14-92 years, lived and studied together.

The objectives of the retreat were: 1) to provide participants with an innovative educational and cultural experience, 2) to foster communication among persons at different life stages, 3) to break down age-related myths and stereotypes, and 4) to serve as a demonstration project for other local and national intergenerational activities.

The group involved in the retreat was heterogeneous in terms of age, race, ethnic background, socioeconomic status, and education. The participants were recruited from area high schools, colleges, community organizations, and senior centers. Emphasis was placed on selecting individuals who had demonstrated some leadership potential within their own setting.

The retreat was planned by an intergenerational advisory committee which was concerned not only with developing a stimulating educational program, but also with designing activities which would stimulate interaction among the different age groups. To achieve this mixture, the program was divided into three distinct but integrated components: 1) academic sessions, 2) core groups, and 3) recreational/cultural activities. The three components blended together to challenge the participants to contemplate and discuss

the theme -"The Quality of Life as We Enter the '80's"- from an intergenerational perspective.

The academic component involved twenty-two carefully selected University faculty from a variety of academic disciplines and resource people from the community. Although the content included formal college-level presentations, an informal teaching style coupled with a variety of experiential teaching techniques, was used to maximize the involvement and learning of the students. Students were encouraged to share their unique perceptions and life experiences as they related to the content.

The opening session began most appropriately with a stimulating presentation by Maggie Kuhn, National Convener of the Gray Panthers, who highlighted the need for intergenerational relations and challenged participants to succeed in this unique cross generational experience. During the remainder of the week, faculty and guest speakers addressed topics such as the family, war and peace, technology and the environment, work and success, sexuality, stages of life development, holistic health, the arts, religion, and death and dying from a variety of perspectives.

The classroom sessions were complemented by the small, age-integrated support groups which were formed as a unique approach for encouraging meaningful interchange among the participants. Five core groups, each with 10 participants and a professional facilitator trained in both group process and life span development, became closely-knit intergenerational "family" units that provided participants with a sense of belonging. These groups met daily to provide an opportunity for personalizing some of the issues

raised in the academic classes and sharing life experiences. A climate of trust was developed as group members began to disclose personal feelings, fears, and needs. A poignant example of this occured when a young and a middle-aged member of a group revealed that they would choose to end their lives rather than face a period of disability and dependence. The caring expressed by older members as they attempted to help these younger individuals cope with their fears of aging brought the group to a deeper level of understanding and intimacy.

Recreational and cultural activities added a third major component of the program. Swimming, tennis, and hiking provided participants with some physical activity and a variety of theatrical, musical, and dance performances were offered in the evenings. On the final night of the retreat, the participants organized their own talent show. This event was a source of great pride for the participants and was a vivid demonstration that people of all ages have talents and resources to contribute.

As a result of this week of intrapersonal (diaries), interpersonal (dyads, meals, freetime, etc.), small group/"family" (cores) and whole/large group communication, a very strong community was created which still exists. The Across Ages organization has been formed and is dedicated to developing ongoing programs which would further reduce the gap among generations.

III. EVALUATION*

Evaluation of the intergenerational retreat was multi-level in nature. Using a variety of objective measures, feedback on all aspects of the retreat

*Formal evaluation by Virginia Lewis Smith, Ed.D., available on request from Temple University Institute on Aging, 1601 North Broad Street, Philadelphia, PA 19122. Attn: Intergenerational Activities.

was obtained. Daily logs in which participants expressed their reactions to the various experiences and reflected on their personal learnings were also used as subjective means of evaluation.

The structured academic classes were seen as the most stimulating component of the retreat. This first exposure to college level education proved to be particularly exciting for many of the older people and high school students. Though initially intimidated by the idea of "going to college," the participants interacted quite freely with instructors and were surprised by the amount they could contribute as a result of their own life experiences.

> "I realized that I can concentrate and enjoy delving into a variety of subjects at this stage of my life. Education does not end at a certain age -it can go on for the rest of one's life." (age 72)

In retrospect, retreat planners felt that another retreat could 1) have a less extensive variety of disciplines represented and 2) key in on specific biological/holistic health and communication concerns with an emphasis on lifelong learning and planning.

The opportunity to work with such a heterogeneous population also proved to be a valuable sensitizing experience for the multidisciplinary faculty. One instructor, who had never taught a class involving older people, commented:

> "The retreat was certainly an emotional and professional high point for me. It forced me to ask myself important questions about my own attitudes toward aging and the aged."

The faculty as a whole responded very positively. Many offered to "do it again". Some have begun to integrate cross-age concerns into their courses.

The evaluations also indicated that the core groups were a significant factor contributing to the success of the retreat. These small family units provided participants with an opportunity to freely express themselves and develop meaningful relationships. For some, the core groups served as a source of love and support not available to them at home.

> "Being able to become close to people, to relate on a personal level and to be in touch with my feelings were incredibly valuable to me." (age 48)
>
> "Life is beautiful when I let go and share my feelings with others." (age 70).

In general, comments from participants reflected a shift in attitudes regarding other age groups and positive realizations about self.

> "I have a more gentle attitude toward older people and I've learned that growing old can be a good experience." (age 22)
>
> "I learned that young people aren't the only ones who can learn and have fun. I didn't know you could enjoy yourself so much with an old person." (age 15)
>
> "Something I realized about myself was that I can listen, learn, and still hope to fulfill a desire to attend college someday." (age 79)

It was clear that the residential aspect of the retreat greatly enhanced the total program. Eight days of dormitory living contributed to the strong sense of community that developed. It facilitated communication and expression among participants.

Of course, the retreat was not without problems in planning and administration. Those rough edges made the retreat a learning experience for the planners as well as the participants. Recruiting middle-aged persons proved to be more difficult than anticipated. Thus, that group was underrepresented. Special attention was not given to their needs. The retreat was also physically and emotionally demanding, particularly for those older adults who had a disability. Despite the fact that transportation around campus was

provided for some participants and rest periods were encouraged, a less rigid schedule would have given people more time to integrate learnings and would have encouraged informal communication. But all things considered, the retreat far surpassed expectations of either planners or participants.

It was hoped that the retreat would be a catalyst for other intergenerational activities and would go beyond being a meaningful one-time experience for fifty people. To further this goal, a number of follow-up actions have been initiated.

IV. FOLLOW-UP

A. An official Across Ages organization was formed following the 1980 retreat. An advisory board, made up of officers and liaison staff members from the Institute, planned meetings, on-going programs, and workshops. A brochure was developed and printed for publicity purposes. Some of the original retreatants served as advisors for the 1981 retreat and were available for speaking engagements at churches and schools.

B. The videotape which accompanies this paper, "Across Ages: A New Approach to Intergenerational Learning," has been shown in a variety of settings around the country and is stimulating other intergenerational activities in classrooms, communities, and national organizations. The tape has been selected for viewing at the 1981 White House Conference on Aging. A description of the tape appears as Appendix II.

C. Consultations with local public and private schools have stimulated the development of curricula that incorporates aging content and experiences. Other strategies for involving older adults in schools and younger students in senior centers are being explored.

D. A Center for Intergenerational Learning is being formed within the University's Institute on Aging dedicated to gathering, creating, and disseminating intergenerational programs and practices.

E. A variety of funding sources for future intergenerational activities have been pursued. The lack of financial resources is a real barrier to offering these programs to a heterogeneous group that includes low-income people. University institutes are not often in a financial position to fully fund such opportunities. Alternative modes of funding must be sought. Inviting a group of high school principals was one way of raising consciousness and encouraging participation (both financial and physical) in the program.

F. As a result of the success of the 1980 retreat and because of the financial response of a number of organizations to the videotape, a second retreat was held July 14-19, 1981. The theme was "Lifelong Wellness: Body, Mind and Spirit." That retreat had 60 participants and 8 staff members. Approximately one-half of the participants have become active in Across Ages. An evaluation of the retreat, done by Adelaide Sugarman, Master's candidate in Adult Education, is also available from the institute. In addition, a 12-minute slide/tape program with retreat manual is being developed by Dr. Henkin and her staff.

V. IMPLICATIONS

From this experience, we learned that intergenerational communication in such a context works. It does, indeed, break down negative stereotyping as it combats age segregation through cross-age learning and living.

A retreat, of course, is not the only way to achieve an appreciation of all ages. College courses, Foster Grandparents, oral history projects, shared

housing and job banks are just a few examples of other means of achieving the same ends. What is needed is an intergenerational orientation to all of life-at work, at home, at play. No matter where we are we can devise ways of becoming sensitive to, and meeting the needs and concerns of, all ages around us --to truly live as a community of human beings.

The benefits of a intergenerational orientation are numerous. Learning to communicate with all ages outside the family might well translate into helping to alleviate problems between parents and children across the life span. Adult "children" and aging parents could have a better frame from which to operate as needs change. Such an orientation ought also to help health practitioners who are caring for older adults, at the same time that it would enhance the care given (Edinberg, 1978; Jelly, 1980; Bottom, 1980). Communication scholars ought to be dealing with not only building and maintaining relationships but also with the special difficulty of ending intergenerational interpersonal relationships.

Through interaction with elders, young people can gain an understanding of the past, an enlarged perspective on the present, insight into the future, and a sense of life as an ongoing process in which aging is a fundamental component. Intergenerational relationships can help older people cultivate meaningful friendships which can provide support, particularly in times of loss or illness. They also can add meaning to the lives of older people by giving them the opportunity to influence the future by transmitting their skills and knowledge to youth. Contact and exchange among persons of all ages preserves continuity from generation to generation (Woelfel, 1976).

We need to join together, people of all ages, and create a new vision for the future. We must begin to view life as a continuum from conception to death. Aging and death need to become part of our orientation to life --not separated and denied. We can no longer separate life into 3 boxes-- youth, adulthood, and old age with corresponding functions of education, work, and leisure. When all ages can go to school, participate in meaningful work, and enjoy leisure throughout their lives, then the barriers among generations will be reduced. We must "surmount youth, surmount old age." We need to bind the generations in shared efforts to reduce segregation and alienation, to increase opportunities for self-fulfillment at any age, to be "fully human and together" (Kuhn, 1980).

Being fully human and together, we can more functionally deal with issues which will affect us all in the future. And, as someone has wisely said, no matter what our age or past, "we must be concerned about the future, because we will all have to spend the rest of our lives there!"

TIME	SUNDAY, JULY 6	MONDAY, JULY 7	TUESDAY, JULY 8	WEDNESDAY, JULY 9	THURSDAY, JULY 10	FRIDAY, JULY 11	SATURDAY, JULY 12	SUNDAY, JULY 13
A.M. 7:30-8:45		Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast
9:00		Core Groups Meet	Class: "War/Peace"	Class:"Technology/ Environment"	Class: "Work/ Success"	Class: "The Arts" Music and Film	Developmental Psych. Class:"Religion" Death & Dying	Core Groups Meet
11:30							Core Groups Meet	Closing Sharing Session
12:00 Noon		Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch (12:30)	Lunch
1:30		Class:Relationships of the family"	Core Groups	Sexuality	Core Groups	Class:"The Arts"	Class:"New Approaches to Health" Holistic Health	Buses Leave
3:30	Registration	Free Time film, swim	Free time film and Discussion on the Mummers, Swim	Free Time Film, Swim	Free Time Film, swim	Free Time Art class, film swim	Free Time	
5:30	Dinner (Guest Speaker: Maggie Kuhn)	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner-Picnic	
7:30			Society Hill Playhouse	Philadelphia Dance Company			Birthday Party	
8:00	Core Groups Meet	Plays for Living			Ambler Music Festival: Mary Travers/Kingston Trio	Ambler Music Festival: Gala Opening of Pittsburgh Symphony	Talent Show	
9:00	Wine & Cheese	Snack	Snack	Astronomy Workshop				

APPENDIX I
OUTLINE OF EVENTS
ACROSS AGES
INTERGENERATIONAL RETREAT
JULY 6-13, 1980

APPENDIX II

VIDEOTAPE DESCRIPTION

"Across Ages: A New Approach to Intergenerational Learning"
28 minutes - 3/4" video cassette, directed by Rich Wilson, M.F.A., Temple University. Available through Temple University Institute on Aging for purchase ($250) or rental ($40).

This sensitive presentation documents a unique intergenerational learning retreat held in the summer of 1980 on the lovely suburban Ambler campus of Temple University in Philadelphia. The tape portrays fifty retreatants and facilitators, ranging in age from fourteen to ninety-two years, as they communicated with one another during academic classes, small group discussions and recreational/cultural events over an eight-day period. The tape underscores the advantages of such programs in breaking down age-related stereotypes and bridging the gap among generations.

In addition to simply documenting the activities of this residential retreat, "Across Ages..." conveys the spirit of the venture and the feeling of community which developed among the participants. The mood and focus are captured through use of low-key narration interspersed with portions of a variety of faculty lectures, small group discussions, group activities and part of Maggie Kuhn's keynote address.

The tape has had a impact on every group which has viewed it thus far. It touches the very heart of the matters at hand, sparks discussion and leads to the question: "When's the next retreat?" Because of the response from participants and funding sources, a second retreat, held July 14-19, 1981, with the theme: "Lifelone Wellness...Body, Mind and Spirit," was nearly self-supporting!

The tape is a documentary, a discussion starter and a view of one model program aimed at stimulating intergenerational dialogue and confronting age-related negative myths and stereotypes.

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